

Diocese of Covington
High School Safe Environment Resources

MORAL VIRTUES OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH

PRUDENCE is the opposite of being impulsive. Acting impulsively is okay when you are two years old. It may even be appropriate in certain settings that call for creativity or spontaneity. But making moral decisions impulsively can get you into trouble. Prudence requires that you approach moral problems with a degree of caution. Also called *wise judgment*, prudence relies heavily on our reason. In fact, Saint Thomas Aquinas called it “right reason in action” (CCC 1806) Prudence helps you stop and think before you act.

JUSTICE is the virtue concerned with giving both God and neighbor what is their due. It is the habit of thinking about needs of others as much as your own needs and acting on what you know to be fair. It takes determination and dedication to be a just person. The Scriptures take justice a step further than fairness: justice is about loving your neighbor. Fairness is doing an equal share of work; justice is doing more because someone else can't.

TEMPERANCE is about balance in your life. You know that stress, greed, or sickness comes from doing too much of a good thing. The pleasures in life must be balanced with moderation. Too much play isn't good. Neither is all work and no play. Exercise is good for our bodies; too much can lead to an obsession. Food is another pleasure we must learn to balance. Good food nourishes our bodies and gives us pleasure; too much leads to obesity, too little and we may develop an eating disorder. People must learn to drink in moderation or they will experience the tragedy of alcoholism. The virtue of temperance is about self-control and balance in all areas of our lives.

FORTITUDE is the moral virtue that strengthens us to overcome obstacles to living morally. It is easy to be good when we have no direct temptation in our lives. When you are not feeling the ecstasy of being in love, the Church's teaching on premarital sex makes perfect sense. If you are not angry, nonviolence is a worthy ideal. But when you are in the heat of any moment, whether it is sexual passion, anger, or some other strong feeling, fortitude gives you strength to overcome the temptation. You must practice these virtues even when they don't come naturally. If you persevere, eventually they will become a more natural way of life for you. The good news is that God is with us in the struggle to live virtuous lives. With God guiding our efforts through divine grace, the cardinal virtues will bring our moral lives to a higher level of integrity.